EDITORIAL PREFACE

David Parsons, College of Sciences, School of Engineering and Advanced Technology, Massey University, Auckland, New Zealand

Welcome to the first issue of volume 6 of the *International Journal of Mobile and Blended Learning*. This journal embraces a rich and varied field of research, and the articles in this issue serve to emphasise just how diverse the work in this area can be, both geographically and in research focus. The authors who have contributed to this issue explore Kenya, an Australian prison, types of blended learning and mobile design principles. It is also notable that the majority of the authors represented in this issue come from the United States. For some years it seemed to be the case that mobile and blended learning researchers in the US and other parts of the world operated somewhat separately. Early issues of the IJMBL had few contributions from American researchers, despite the journal attracting submissions from many other parts of the world. It is therefore very encouraging to see an increasing interest in the journal from researchers in the United States, and I believe that the journal now has a truly global representation.

We begin this issue with '*Using smartphone technology in environmental sustainability education: The case of the Maasai Mara region in Kenya*' by James Dogbey, Cassie Quigley, Megan Che and Jeffrey Hallo from Clemson University in South Carolina, USA. In this study, 38 teachers and faculty from Narok County and the Maasai Mara region participated in a six month long process of creating and sharing 'photovoices' to reflect the key concerns of their community around environmental issues such as nature, sustainability, conservation, and preservation. The photovoice technique involves creating and sharing digital photographs and written narratives. It enables a community to reflect on its concerns in a way that is very much learner and community driven. Despite many challenges with limited connectivity and lack of electricity for charging, most of the participants were able to learn and contribute a great deal in the project. Since one of the aims of the photovoice technique is to reach policymakers, it is hoped that the publication of this paper will help to further disseminate the community voices of the Maasai Mara region and their insights into how the environment may be preserved for future generations.

Our second article is '*Providing simulated online and mobile learning experiences in a prison education setting: Lessons learned from the PLEIADES pilot project*' by Helen Farley, Angela Murphy, Tasman Bedford, from the University of Southern Queensland, Australia. Trying to provide mobile learning tools in a prison setting, where restrictions on internet

access, memory cards etc. are very significant, is an extremely challenging task for educators. PLEIADES (Portable Learning Environments for Incarcerated Distance Education Students) was designed to provide access to internet-independent secure digital and mobile technologies. This paper describes how specially selected eReaders were used to enable prisoners to benefit from mobile learning by accessing an internet-independent version of Moodle. The restrictions on the eReaders themselves, to allow them to be used in a prison setting, were difficult to meet with current products; they had to have no wireless connection, and no memory card slot, as well as having a long battery life. The research team were, however, able to secure such devices for the project, though some issues around copyright, and the allowed electronic formats for documents, remained problematic. The project applied a design based research method, supported by data generated from focus groups and surveys. At the end of the pilot, 4 out of 7 students in the study passed the course they were taking. Given the extreme difficulties faced in this context, this result was encouraging enough for the pilot to be followed by further, related interventions. It will be interesting to see the results of these subsequent efforts to improve teaching and learning in prison settings using mobile devices.

The third article in this issue is '*Blended course design: where's the pedagogy?*' by Patricia McGee of the University of Texas at San Antonio, USA. In this paper, Patricia analyses a large body of work on blended learning in order to identify various recurring themes and characteristics of blended learning. She analyses the often poorly-defined term 'blended learning' along with related terms such as 'hybrid learning', drawing from the literature some key aspects of what elements are important in blended learning delivery. In addition to exploring definitions of blended learning, the article identifies some core themes in blended learning research; Meetings for the Learner, online activities and interactions, the use of technology, online interactions, active learning, distribution of time, pedagogical chunking, and outliers and omissions. Such an analysis provides us with a useful insight into how blended learning has been delivered and researched. The article concludes with a useful checklist of questions that should help us reflect more effectively on blended learning design and delivery.

The final article in this issue is '*Analyzing the effects of context-aware mobile design principles on student learning*' by Eric Seneca, from Our Lady of the Lake College in Louisiana, USA. Unlike the preceding articles this one takes an experimental approach. The article begins with an overview of the increasing relevance of mobile apps to contemporary learners, and an analysis of the role of context on mobile learning. This is followed by a set of mobile HCI guidelines extracted from the literature to support the development of a mobile learning app; Every topic within an app must have both text and audio/video components, self-assessment is used to allow students to self-diagnose their own understanding, text-based material should be readable within 90 seconds, all video and audio-based instructional material is recommended not to exceed two minutes, primary instructional material exists on the device and should not require Internet services to operate, and all instructional materials should be available within 15 seconds of app launch with a maximum of five interface touches to access relevant information. The context for the study reported in this article was an 'upper extremities muscle anatomy component of a kinesiology class'. The focus of the research was the application of Mobile HCI principles to the design of an mlearning iOS app. Perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of the experiment was that the control group were given a 'placebo' app, which contained basic documents from the course Moodle site. Thus both the experimental and control groups were given mobile learning tools, but only the experimental group were give a mobile app using the HCI guidelines

outlined in the paper. The paper concludes with the assertion, supported by statistical analysis of the results, that "The data collected in this study suggest that the mobile design principles allowed for a more effective learning experience for the students."

The articles published in this issue provide valuable insights into a wide range of issues in mobile and blended learning. They also provide some unique contributions to the literature that should prove worthy of a wide readership, and are a welcome addition to this journal's set of publications.

David Parsons
Editor in Chief
IJMBL

David Parsons is Associate Professor of Information Technology at Massey University, Auckland, New Zealand. He has a PhD in Information Technology from Nottingham Trent University (UK) and has wide experience in both academia and industry. He is the founding Editor-in-Chief of the International Journal of Mobile and Blended Learning *and author of a number of texts on computer programming, web application development and mobile learning. His work has been published in many international journals, including* Computers & Education, IEEE Transactions on Learning Technologies *and* Software Practice and Experience*. He chaired the Conference on Mobile Learning Technologies and Applications in 2007 and was co-editor of* Innovative Mobile Learning: Techniques and Technologies *(*Information Science Reference*, 2009). He is a member of the International Association for Mobile Learning and a professional member of the British Computer Society.*